

Striking out *in Hackney*

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STAMP - EDE!

WILDCAT ACTION WINS

In recent weeks some members of the Trade Union Support Unit (TUSU) have been on unofficial strike action. These have included postal workers, housing benefit workers and teachers. Reproduced below is a report on the dispute at Mount Pleasant Sorting Office, which should help other workers thinking of taking strike action.

"At 9.15am on Friday June 24th, the early shift at Mount Pleasant Post Office in Farringdon, the largest sorting office in the country, walked out on strike, in support of Milton Keynes postal workers. Milton Keynes workers had walked out two days earlier because local managers had decided unilaterally to use casual labour rather than give their regular staff overtime. Overtime, unfortunately, is a necessity in the post office because of low basic pay, and we are against the exploitation of unorganised casuals, who have no rights, and are used by management to undermine the union. The post office sent out lorry loads of diverted mail from Milton Keynes to offices all over south east England.

They had also taken out a high court injunction against the UCW (Union of Communication Workers) nationally instructing them to disassociate the union from the Milton Keynes dispute, because they had not had a ballot.

A lorry full of diverted mail arrived at Mount Pleasant on Thursday night, but remained unloaded all night. On Friday morning management threatened to suspend us if we would not handle it. We immediately walked out and held a meeting to discuss the situation. We agreed that to handle mail from another office in dispute would mean an end to any collective strength.

We decided to refuse to handle any scab mail and stay out until the dispute at Milton Keynes was resolved. The 300 early shift workers immedi-

ately surrounded the building with pickets, bringing out the late shifts and night shifts, hundreds of people took part in picketing, and even non-union members stayed out. The only people who crossed the picket lines were about 20 casual workers. By 10pm 1,700 sorting staff were out.

Similar action also took place at Northern District Office (Islington), Romford, Ilford, Cambridge, Dagenham, Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable, Bedford and about twenty other offices around South-East England. By Saturday around 30,000 postal workers were on strike.

Our national union officials were meanwhile distancing themselves from the dispute, afraid of seizure of union funds. At Mount Pleasant, managers distributed two 'union bulletins' from the UCW headquarters urging us to return to work. A similar letter was sent to our homes on Saturday morning, again quoting our General Secretary.

However the work force stood firm, refusing to be intimidated by legal threats, and on Saturday afternoon the Post Office met with local union reps to settle the dispute. The members at Milton Keynes voted to accept the agreement and return to work, and consequently the other offices returned to work during the Saturday afternoon and evening.

On Monday morning, Milton Keynes walked

Bulletin of the Hackney Trade Union Support Unit

STRIKE ON THE POST

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out again because of victimisation and their treatment on returning to work. Northampton walked out in support again. The Post Office took out injunctions against UCW officials at local and national level, and

under this pressure Milton Keynes voted to return to work, having received an undertaking that no-one would lose their job as a result of the dispute.

This dispute shows that the Post Office is determined to manage by fear and legal bullying. But it also shows that workers are prepared to take action in defence of basic trade unionism despite the cowardice of na-

tional union officials and in defiance of management's intimidation and legal threats by the High Court.

It is virtually impossible to take industrial action legally in this so-called democratic country. That being the case we are forced to defy the courts to defend our basic rights as workers and trades unionists.

For fear of victimisation the name of the postal worker has been withheld.



LIBRARY WORKERS STRIKE

Library workers have voted unanimously to strike on 19th July in protest at proposals to axe 12 Library Attendants and the Area structure for the south of Hackney. Management are ignoring the first of these cuts, and lying that only 2.1% of the budget is to go - in fact 10% is being cut in all. The cuts mean the lowest-paid library workers having responsibility for opening and locking up buildings imposed on them without any more pay two years after a "restructuring" which slashed professional staff and dumped more responsibility on the already under-graded Library Assistants. These cuts herald casualisation of library work and further losses of trained,

competent staff.

The reduction from three Areas to two is part of the management's plans to axe five to seven of Hackney's fourteen libraries, cutting mostly in the more working class south and east of the borough. Union members see this strike as the beginning of a fight back.

OBITUARY

Gulen Kutluay

Gulen Kutluay died, after a long and protracted illness, on March 1st 1994. She will be deeply missed by those people who knew her. Gulen was a refugee from Turkey, who along with thousands of socialists and trades unionists, including her husband Irfan, was forced to flee after the military coup on September 12th 1980.

Originally she and Irfan went to Denmark and then Britain. She was instrumental in helping to set up the Union of Turkish Women in Britain and later she helped build up the Union of Turkish Workers (UTW) in Balls Pond Road but she and Irfan later broke from the politics of the UTW and left the organisation.

Gulen became the first Turkish worker employed by the Trade Union Support Unit (TUSU) in early 1991 and was employed until council funding ceased in March 1993. Despite her illness she remained in touch with TUSU and the Colin Roach Centre and where health permitted did some translation work. She was a member of the centre.

In her time at TUSU Gulen was particularly involved in recruiting Turkish and Kurdish workers to unions, in the production of a Turkish union newsletter - widely distributed on early morning workplace visits and within the community centres - and on the organising of numerous public meetings and events.

In 1992, the council tried to pressurise Gulen, her co-worker and the management committee into moving to the Dalston Enterprise Centre and even into offering advice to the textile sweatshop owners that Gulen had been organising against, Gulen made plain her opposition.

The two workers, along with 3 members of the management committee looked for alternative premises and joined with Hackney Community Defence Association and Halkder to set up the Colin Roach Centre. The council's revenge was to remove funding and make both workers redundant.

Over 700 people attended Gulen's funeral. A larger commemoration event is hopefully to be held in September of this year (details to follow later).

TUSU members send our deepest condolences to Irfan, Gulen's mam and dad, her family and her friends. We will not forget her and we will not forget that her life was dedicated to the struggle for social justice and a socialist future.

SLAUGHTER OF THE YOUTH SERVICE

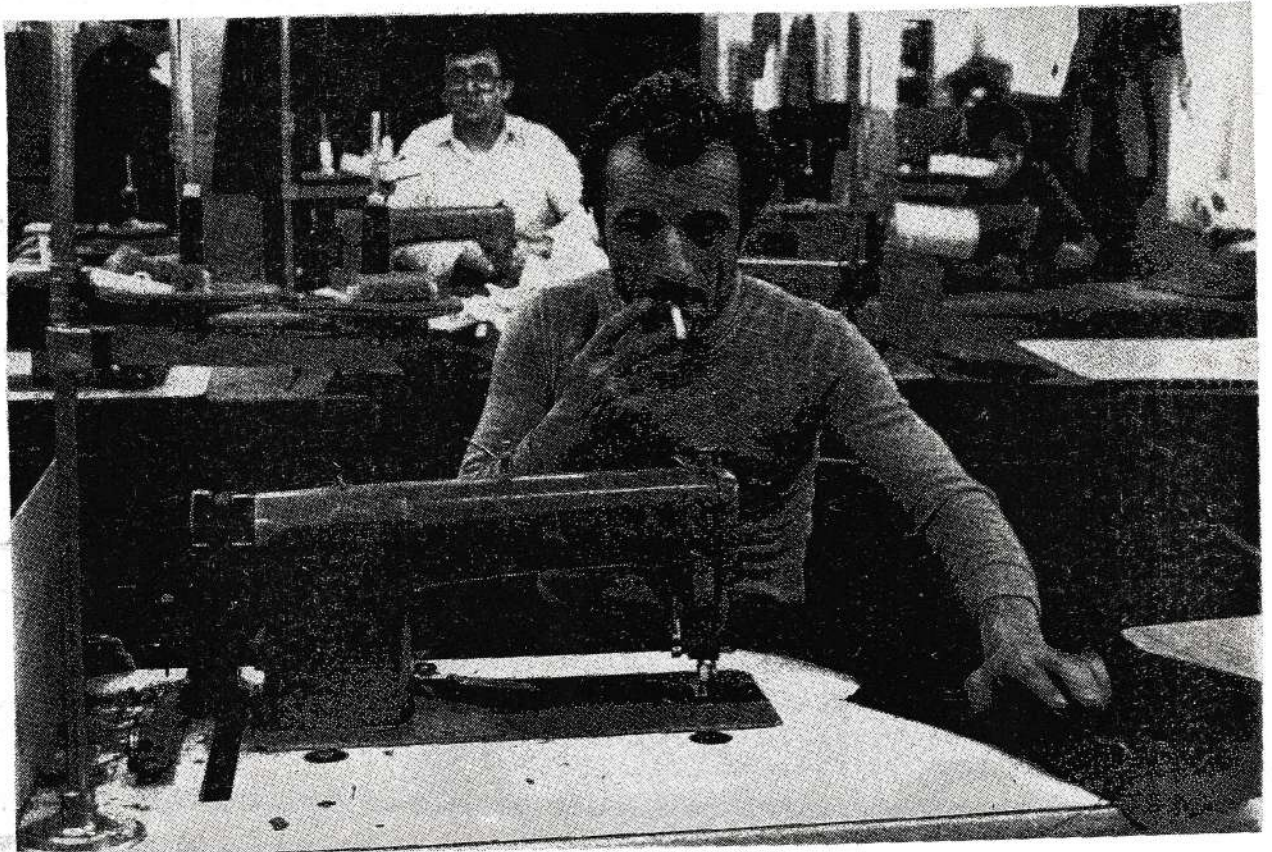
Hackney Council are planning to decimate the Borough's Youth Service with cuts of £400,000 to the staffing budget. This vital service has already been slashed by 66% in the last few years. The effects will be drastic cuts in opening hours. Our message to Hackney's youth is - Don't stand for it: Occupy the Youth centres, and get down to Hackney Town Hall in numbers, and show the councillors what you think of them.

Fifty take unofficial action over racist legislation

Hackney's housing benefit workers walked out, at the beginning of July, after management suspended two workers for refusing to carry out racist immigration checks on benefit claimants. Workers had voted at the end of May to boycott the "Persons from abroad" legislation which Hackney council had been falling over themselves to implement. The walkout shows the strength of feeling not only against the racist legislation, but also against managers' attempts to victimise trade unionists, and undermine union organisation in the offices. Unfortunately, workers voted the following day to call off the action. UNISON officials told them they would not get union backing for their action, and argued strongly for the workers to return to work. Despite blatant scabbing, stewards at the offices are still holding together union organisation. Management have since approached union reps to discuss implementing the legislation "humanely".

HACKNEY TEXTILE WORKERS

STITCHING UP THE BOSSES



On Saturday April 9th, a speaker from TUSU was part of a 75 strong meeting in the Daymer Community Centre. The Meeting was part of ongoing work by TUSU with Turkish and Kurdish workers, who in recent times have, once again, begun to discuss union organisation in Britain.

Most of those present were workers in the textile industry but there were also people who worked in shops and restaurants. In all, seventeen people became members of the Transport and General Workers Union and since then many more have

joined. Discussions are underway with TGWU officials about which branch the workers should join.

TUSU also assisted with getting publicity for low paid workers when it worked with Radio 4's Today programme on a report on low pay. Refugees spoke briefly about their exploitation by the bosses.

Workers in the factories recently put out a leaflet which we have reproduced below overleaf.

STOP BRINGING DOWN THE WAGES!

Work conditions in textile factories are becoming more and more unbearable. Therefore, as a group of workers in Well Street, we have come together in order to write a leaflet on our common problems and to begin to solve them together.

What are our problems? Our wages are being brought down every day. A sewing machine worker is being paid much less today compared to 1 - 2 years ago, although we work non-stop and are paid for the number of items we do. We, the pressers, the sewing machine workers, stekflesters, finishers, almost everyone who works in textiles and is paid weekly is complaining among ourselves about our low wages.

For instance, the prices of the goods are increasing everyday. Whoever goes shopping can see this clearly. Moreover we have to pay for our gas and electricity bills and some rent if we have a council flat. A few years ago we could make some savings but today we cannot live on our wages, let alone save. If we take all this into consideration we can see how our wages are being brought down.

On the other side we don't have any trade union protection or insurance, no legal guarantees and more importantly we are not united and organised on the basis of our common problems. If we talk about doing something to solve our problems many people say "we can't do anything" or "we can't succeed."

We are not sensitive enough to our problems. When the bosses see that we, the workers, are not united, they intensify their oppressions. They come together and create conditions for us to work for an extra half-an-hour without being paid. However, we the workers, are not uniting although we have so many common problems such as:-

- * Our wages are being brought down everyday
- * The workplaces lack healthy conditions
- * We are working an extra half-an-hour which is not paid
- * We have a ten minute tea-time instead of 15
- * We are being dismissed unjustly and without any notice
- * The bosses and managers humiliate us
- * We don't have any legal guarantees
- * We work overtime from 5.30 to 8.30 without being given dinner
- * We are being forced to work overtime and are not being paid for overtime hours

It is possible to give more examples of our problems. We have a lot of reasons to come together and there are no obstacles to do this except ourselves.

It is high time that we united. The solution to our problems is not being reflected in action - neither individual action nor action in our workplaces. The only solution to our problems is to unite on basic rights by unifying our power which comes from production and striving together.

Stop bringing down our wages
No to working an extra half an hour which is not paid
No to obligatory overtime
No to an unhealthy workplace

This is taken from a leaflet produced and distributed by a group of textile workers from Well St.

In the next few weeks it is proposed to (re) start leafleting of textile factories, along with Turkish comrades - if you are willing to help then phone on 071 249 8086 for details.

CARE WORKERS- ORGANISE!

We are increasingly being told by bosses and politicians that community care is going well, and that services are improving. If you weren't born yesterday, you'll know that this is a sick joke-especially in Hackney.

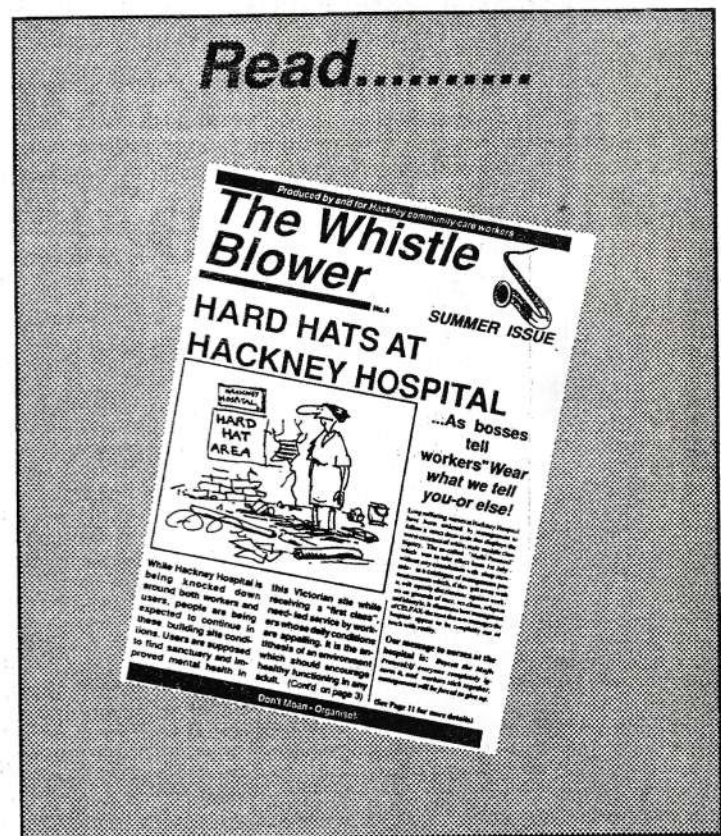
The Government's so-called community care initiative is a con. People are being thrown on to the streets of Hackney, or left alone in their homes to fend for themselves, while services crumble around them.

Workers face pay cuts, longer hours and atrocious working conditions. Managers of services are giving themselves big wages, creating their own empires that might look good on paper, to the accountant, but are completely out of touch with the real needs of people.

We are not stupid. We deserve better than this.

As workers at the cutting edge of community care we are sick of trying to paper over the cracks. Community Care workers in Hackney have started organising together-along with users- to resist the attacks on community care -People have a right to care according to need, not their wage packet.

If you are interested in getting involved, Hackney Community Care Workers meet once a month. We produce and distribute the *"The Whistle Blower"*.



SECTARIANISM AND TRADE UNIONS- THE REALITY

TUSU has linked up with other groups to plan a week-long series of events starting on November 21st to commemorate the struggle by Irish Nationalists against the British Army's 25th year of occupation of N.Ireland. It is our aim to give an opportunity for trade union branches to hear directly from those involved in the process of working for a united Ireland. A meeting at Fords Dagenham is being arranged and on November 27th Mary Nellis, Sinn Fein Councillor in Derry, will be speaking at a public meeting in Hackney.

In the lead up to these events we are holding, on October 13th, a discussion meeting on 'British Unions in Ireland,' and examining their role, aims and practices. The recent experiences of a trade unionist in N. Ireland shows why such an analysis is required.

Moira Daly, a member of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union (MSF), applied for promotion in 1992. She and her husband, an electrician and AEEUU member, had worked at the Fords Factory in Belfast for a number of years.

The following day their pictures appeared on the union noticeboard, along with their home address and car registration number. Underneath was written UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force), a clear signal that Moira Daly and her husband had been targeted for assassination by loyalist paramilitaries. The police advised them to stay away from work and later told them that they were being watched at their home by known assassins. (how they knew this and

why they decided to do nothing about it is another matter!) Her requests for support from other union members stood no chance of support, her senior shop steward, is a leading member of the local Orange Order Lodge and, as such, opposed to equal opportunities for Catholic workers. In addition, her husbands, senior steward is also an Orange Order member. Union branch meetings are held in staunchly Loyalist drinking clubs. Surprisingly Moira Daly's case became known by ordinary workers (including a confirmed Tory !) at Fords Dagenham and they began to ask their own union officials about her position. All wanted to ignore the case, but were forced to intervene. Shop stewards at Fords Belfast were pressurised and convened a meeting with the UVF, who promptly announced that their plans to kill Moira Daly and her husband had been called off. Whilst Moira Daly and her husband were forced to stay off work the management at Fords did little or nothing to support her. Now back at work, along with her husband, she is taking the company to industrial tribunal on the grounds of religious and sexual discrimination.

It is to be hoped that this 'non-political woman' (her own words) is awarded a sum which gives her some form of minor satisfaction. Certainly her success in staying alive owes little or nothing to the trade unions in N.Ireland or the bureaucracy in Britain. Moira Daly and her husband are Catholics, who up until this recent incident had shown little or no interest in politics.

BY-PASSING THE BUREAUCRACY

The past few months have seen a small but steady rise in workers' confidence to take action to defend themselves. The actions, both official and unofficial, have affected many sectors- notably the postal service and railways, and in Hackney a walkout by over fifty Housing Benefit workers over racist immigration harassment. It's good to see workers getting stuck in again, and ignoring union officials.

Signal workers

The signal workers' action is something different: currently escalating into action that will cost the employers millions in profits, we welcome the panic that it is causing the bosses. But when it comes down to it, we have to recognise that the action has been called and controlled by union bureaucrats, working strictly within the law. It is clear that the actual signal workers have little say in negotiations. Unfortunately, for these reasons, the "negotiators" could sell out the dispute at any time. Without the flexibility and creativity of worker-controlled action, this may be inevitable.

Really effective workers' action is when rank and file workers on the ground take action to defend ourselves through direct action - strikes, occupations, sabotage. These methods are controlled by workers in the workplace, and are usually unofficial, and/or illegal **but they work**.

When we take effective action ourselves, without waiting for union leaders to tell us we can, we see a glimpse of the results we can get, and the power that we actually hold. As in the recent strikes by postal workers, managers will often cave in quickly, frustrated that they can't find any "leaders" with whom to stitch up a deal and sell out. Over the past few years, we have also seen offshore workers and tube workers take unofficial, illegal action - outside of the control of the union bureaucracy - and get results.

These actions *can* get results but because their methods of organisation are usually ad-hoc and

sporadic, the basis of organisation - the strike committee, or strike support group- usually dies out when the dispute ends.

At present, there is a massive vacuum in terms of workers' resistance. There is a desperate need to encourage and support workers who take independent action, and to bring this together across different industries and sectors, into active organisations that are strong enough to be permanent. This can only be effective through workers - employed and unemployed-coming together and working independently of political parties and union bureaucracies.

This is not new - *it is revolutionary*. When organised labour first came together in Britain, the class struggle was central. **The fight for short-term gains was directly linked with the clear recognition that the bosses had to go, and workers needed to plan to take control of their workplace, along with the "community"**. Particularly up to the years before and during the first world war, there was a strong, independent revolutionary workers' movement based in the workplace.

For years, TUSU has gained respect for supporting workers who take action, much of which is either ignored, sold out or sabotaged by union leaders. In the past few months, TUSU has started looking at how we can build on this, and coordinate our work to make it more effective. This, the first bulletin that we have brought out for a long time, hopefully gives some sense of workers' confidence. Our aim is to support, harness and help build this into a militant and revolutionary force that will begin to actually start challenging the system we are in.

After all, that was the aim when unions were first founded.

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hackney trade union support unit

for militant, independent, militant, combative trade unionism

c/o colin roach centre, 10a bradbury st, n16, tel:071 249 8086

UP AND COMING EVENTS

Every Saturday - Free immigration advice sessions for English and Turkish speaking people. 5 - 7pm.

August 25th - TUSU working meeting 7.30 pm, Colin Roach Centre, 10A Bradbury St.

September 8th - discussion meeting on 'Women in struggle.'

Venue - Colin Roach Centre at 7.30pm.

September 10th - Textile workers organise public meeting at Day-Mer Community Centre, 4pm-7pm, The Old Library, Howard Road, N16.

22nd September- TUSU working meeting: Details As above

October 13th - discussion meeting on 'The role of British Trade Unions in N. Ireland.'

Venue - Colin Roach Centre at 7.30pm

October 15th - 'Solidarity with Sudanese Workers' public meeting
At Friends Meeting House, Euston. 1.30 - 4.30pm.
Jointly organised with the Sudanese Trade Union Alliance

October 27th- TUSU working meeting: Details as above.

Early November - Colin Roach Centre discussion conference

November 21st - November 26th - TUSU is helping to organise a trade union speaking tour by a representative of the Nationalist Community in N.Ireland. Meetings at Fords Dagenham and other workplaces are already being organised. If you can help and/or would like a speaker then let us know a.s.a.p.

November 27th - Public meeting at the Halkevi with Mary Nellis, Sinn Fein Councillor from Derry.

** In addition we also plan to organise a speaking tour by MacDonalds workers from different countries - they will be in Britain later this year as witnesses for the McLibel 2, who are being sued by MacDonalds. For further details and/or offers of help then phone 071 249 8086.*

I would like more information on Hackney Trade union Support Unit. Please put me on your mailing list.

Name

Address